

**Testimony of Barbara Vita supporting  
SB487 An Act Establishing the Infant and Toddler Early Care and Family Support Initiative**

Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlan, member of the Finance Committee, my name is Barbara Vita and I live in Bloomfield. I am the Coordinator of the Connecticut Children's Collective, the state's Intermediary organization that connects local early childhood collaboratives to the SDE and OEC. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB487.

From birth, in the next three years, a baby's brain will grow 80%. The rate, and success of growing a brain that is receptive to learning, emotional regulation, and a healthy body, is determined by their environment. Right from the start babies begin forming synapses. Synapses are what connects neurons in our brains, without synapses neurons don't connect, and the potential for learning and growth diminishes. Basically the synapses say to the neurons, let's connect, we'll do great things together. So imagine if you will a synapse taking the hand of one neuron and taking the hand of another neuron and joining their hands together. As the neurons mature, more and more synapses are made. At birth, the number of synapses per neuron is 2,500, but by age two or three, it's about **15,000 per neuron**. By age 3, the synaptic connections have grown to **1000 trillion**. This is the best-case-scenario. If a baby is cared for and loved, read to, sung to, touched and spoken to—these actions are what spark those synapses to fire and connect those neurons.

In Connecticut there is a need for roughly 50,000 slots for infant and toddler care in our childcare system. The ratio for infant and child care is 4 babies to 1 caregiver. This translates to high costs for parents to provide childcare for their babies as they return to work, and high costs for childcare providers, which ultimately translates to very low wages for the caregivers. So without these slots, parents can't work or they are forced to leave their infants in care that is not high quality. And this worries me. What happens when a baby is kept in a crib or playpen all day? What happens when a baby is left in a stroller or car seat all day? What happens when those babies start to cry and no one picks them up to sooth them or feed them or change their diapers. What happens if the baby is surrounded by yelling or is yelled at themselves? What happens is that the synapses don't introduce the neurons to each other and the baby's brain doesn't grow as it should. The baby will have difficulty bonding, self-regulating emotions, learning, walking, and these effects, if not addressed, will last a life time. They are what we know now to be ACES, Adverse Childhood Experiences. This Act will create an opportunity for all of our Connecticut babies and toddlers to have the opportunity to grow up healthy and happy in safe and loving environment.

We are at a cross roads right now; one that boils down to morality—not money. Are we a civilized society that agrees that we protect FIRST our most vulnerable? Because these babies are innocent, and helpless, and looking to us for help. Parents want what is best for their children, of course they do. But parents often do what they have been taught, or what they have experienced. Let's pass this bill so we can provide high quality infant and toddler care so parents can work and providers can pay their staff a living wage. But let's also pass this bill so that we can provide family supports to parents who need extra coaching and education so they can learn about their developing baby and then do better. ACES is largely generational, we have the ability with this Act to help ameliorate the lived trauma and begin to heal our society.

You will see fewer cases of violence, you will see more school success, you will see healthier –both physical and mental- -children and families. You will see a thriving society that has children and adults contributing in a positive way—you will see innovation and growth. I urge you to pass **SB487 An Act Establishing the Infant and Toddler Early Care and Family Support Initiative**. Start Connecticut's transformation at the beginning, it's a really good place to start. I leave you with Frederick Douglass's famous quote: "It's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

I thank you for your time and consideration.